



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Gulf States, feds agree seafood safe based on sampling results

BATON ROUGE, La. – The states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, along with federal partners, are pleased to announce that hundreds of samples of fish and shellfish, collected and analyzed in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, show no reason for concern about the consumption of Gulf seafood. The samples were analyzed for chemical and microbiological contaminants that could have been introduced by the hurricanes. The extensive seafood tissue sampling occurred in an area from the estuaries of New Orleans to Gulf Shores, Ala. The sampled areas included Lake Pontchartrain, Mississippi Sound, Mobile Bay as well as the offshore areas of the northern Gulf of Mexico.

Continued monitoring is in progress. These results will be announced as they become available. The sampling efforts are conducted in conjunction with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Health officials advise that consuming raw seafood always poses a potential risk from bacterial and viral contamination. This risk can be reduced by thoroughly cooking seafood. Some areas currently subject to oyster harvest in the affected areas are closed until routine sampling from existing state Molluscan Shellfish Programs determines that area waters are of adequate quality to reopen oyster grounds. However, many oyster harvest areas have already been tested and re-opened.

As always, fishermen should avoid catching seafood in areas with visible oil sheens or slicks, and should only harvest live seafood. Consumers should follow proper sanitary practices when handling and preparing seafood for consumption. Also, health officials advise that following simple guidelines is appropriate when preparing fish and seafood at any time, not only after a storm event. These guidelines include keeping seafood cold until ready to cook and thoroughly cooking seafood. Consumers can further reduce risk by not eating the skin or organs, such as crab “fat.” It is also recommended that broiling, grilling or poaching fish are healthy, low-fat methods of cooking.

For more information, contact the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (Kathleen Golden, 1-888-293-7020), the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (Robbie Wilbur, 601-961-5277) or the Alabama Department of Public Health (Dr. Neil Sass, 1-800-201-8208).